

For those old enough to remember the JFK assassination, the first hearing of the news of the September 11th attack is embedded in equally indelible memory. The following are notes of my impressions in the hours and days thereafter:

The foundations, shaken:

Tuesday, Sept. 11th

Not yet adjusted to the new night shift schedule, I awoke at 5:00 AM. I turned on the light to leaf through the *Guardian Weekly* hoping to induce a couple of more hours of sleep. I dozed off until 6:55 AM when the clock radio-alarm, tuned to CBC, turned on. The haze was sharply cut by an ominous announcement:

‘We will bring you up a live report on the plane crash at the World Trade Centre in New York’...

I lurched and turned on the TV, to catch a re-play image of a silhouetted plane in slow motion flying into the World Trade Centre... *‘This is a grave moment of history!’* was the first thought. It seemed an announcement of another Pearl Harbor if not an event more apocalyptic ...

So for rest of the day, I ignored lesson planning and joined the shock-numbered millions glued to CNN... The faint hope that the deliberate attack was home-grown was soon dashed. Before both towers of the WTC had collapsed, it was clear that this time, unlike in the white-supremacist Oklahoma City bombing, there was a foreign devil to blame. It seemed certain that America was going to war—very possibly a World War Three. There was almost nightmarish certainty that the revenge, still inchoate, would settle on Muslims...

By the time the 4th hijacked plane had crashed (possibly shot down?) in Pennsylvania blind outrage on the TV commentary was hitting a crescendo. Even amid the shock and horror—the networks played up images of Palestinians smiling in the streets. Novelist Tom Clancy urged immediate retaliation once the perpetrators of Middle East origin were identified. Notable was the interview on CNN of the Israeli ambassador by Jeff Greenfield. In the reminder that the attackers on America were bent on the destruction of Israel, Greenfield nodded with a manic excitement: “Now, we get it!”



Well before most Americans heard the name Osama Bin Laden for the first time, I suspected Al Qaeda. I clearly remembered the shock of the locals in passing through Dar es Salaam in August, 1998 in the wake of the Al Qaeda bombings. Then came the torpedoing of the USS Cole in Yemen. Then in following the news of Palestinian *Intifada* in recent weeks, I felt something of the rage building against Bush as the enabler of Sharon... Some explosive reaction was almost palpable...

In the news of the hijacked plane hitting the Pentagon, I cannot deny a tingle of irony. Was that not almost a biblical justice in fire and brimstone scouring the fortress of imperial power? Yet that fleeting satisfaction was abruptly extinguished in the images of fellow human beings falling like ants from the burning towers. Who with a pulse can fail to be horrified in imagining gagging office workers having to choose between roasting alive or plunging ninety floors to their deaths? No less horrific was the imagining of the last moments of the passengers on the plane, several of whom were children... In boarding the plane they were soon to crash, the hijackers had passed babes in arms of fellow passengers— yet were not moved to mercy. They were unimaginably coldblooded!



Friday, Sept. 14th

The names of the hijackers were released today by the FBI. While they fanatically believed in their martyrdom, I wondered about the extent of their political delusions. Did they really think that the World Trade Centre was some mystical nerve-centre of the global imperium? Did they believe that pulling down the ‘temple’ of capitalism they could set off a chain reaction by which western civilization would fall? Did they not consider what might follow if the shaken foundations were to hold?

It probably did enter the fevered brains that the more likely outcome of their attack would be a mighty lashing back of the wounded beast. Such a reaction seems to be already taking shape: a war that will almost certainly widen from targeting Bin Laden to attacking ‘hostile’ figures in the broader Islamic world... Might those not include Palestinian leaders? Presumably a blink away from awakening to dewy-eyed virgins, the hijackers were blind to the probability their act of mass murder could be a godsend to their enemies...

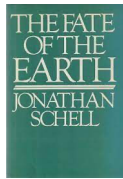


The lead hijacker who flew the first plane into the North tower of the WTC was identified as Mohammed Atta. Already consigned among the arch-villains of history— what manner of human being was he? Did he ever show compassion or a sense of humour? In his final hours, what could possibly have been going through his mind?

On the drive to work, I tried to imagine the last few seconds in the experience of the man apparently in the pilot's seat of United Air #11 as the WTC tower came into view. In 250,000 years of human consciousness— few experiences of that moment preceding a death could have been so strange...

Yet among the sensual delights Mohammad Atta may have imagined in the garden of paradise he so fervently sought, was no video image of the burning towers. For him, along with his victims, the lights just abruptly went out... As hard as I try to evoke the wisdom of Terence (*'nothing human is alien to me...'*) I fail to grasp any semblance of his mind...

Monday, Sept. 17th



After 6 days of shock and mourning— the social order seems to be spinning back towards equilibrium. Flights have resumed and most Americans are back at work... Still, mall traffic is reportedly thin despite the calls to defy the terrorists by going shopping...

Amid haunting reverberations of the fallen towers— the gyroscope of commerce remains wobbly... The smoldering debris in New York City (along with that in Washington and Pennsylvania) has revealed just how even a small rent in the social fabric can threaten the entire superstructure...

I am reminded of the apocalyptic danger of nuclear war as described by Jonathon Schell in *'Fate of the Earth'* (1982). As the author elucidated in stark detail, it would not be the immediate nuclear blasts— not even the radiation nor the ensuing nuclear winter that would end human civilization. Even in the unlikelihood that a small percentage of humanity survives a nuclear holocaust, that remnant would surely perish in the breakdown of social order. Such a breakdown would likely ensue in the devastation of even one major city in the detonation of a single hydrogen bomb.

So it is that the seismic shock at Manhattan “ground zero” late week ought to be a sobering reminder of the intricate interdependence and breath-taking fragility of the social order...

Friday, Sept. 28th



So the coming war now has a name. Bush has declared it to be *'the War on Terrorism'*. No doubt the appellation is deliberately vague so as to provide justification for an unlimited scope of engagement... In the first stage, NATO members appear to be lined up behind the USA while Russia and China are tacitly agreeing to stand aside...

The first strike is almost certainly to be in Kabul, where Al Qaeda operatives, including Bin Laden, apparently have safe haven. The first question is: how many scalps will have to be taken for the 3,000 American lives? Will a 'rational' Israeli ratio of 1-10 suffice— or will it be closer to a Nazi correlation of 1-100? As the war on terrorism widens, might the eventual revenge ratio reach 1-1000?

Of course, the Americans are justified in going after Bin Laden's head. Yet when the missiles hammer down on Kabul (taking incalculable 'collateral damage'), perhaps the big fish of Al Qaeda— perhaps in clean-shaven and business suited disguise— will slip out of Afghanistan. They might be spirited away into the jungles of Indonesia or the southern Philippines therein metastasizing other cells of resistance ...

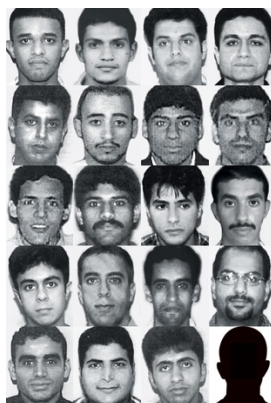
Meanwhile, should the crushing of Al Qaeda be more broadly perceived as the beginning of a crusade against Islam— perhaps thousands of Muslims will be radicalized to join the jihadist cause... It is not hard to imagine thousands standing defiant before the imperial colossus like the slave-army of Spartacus before the might of Rome...

Yet however intense a loathing one may have for the imperial war machine—it is impossible to have a shred of sympathy for Al Qaeda— likely no less so for most Muslims than for non-Muslims. Still, the extent to which Bin Laden was directly responsible for plotting the suicide mission of Sept. 11th is yet to be determined. It could be that he is only a Colonel Sanders figurehead for jihadists. It could be that the Mohammed Atta franchise was a shoe-string operation that succeeded beyond its own crazy expectations due to a series of fateful convergences...

For the moment, it may for the greater good of Muslims— especially American Muslims— that wrath and revenge is focused on the face of one man... Like most villains of history, Bin Laden is probably more of a mediocrity than a diabolical genius.

Yet if he has the capacity to inspire further attacks, then along with hundreds of millions of others—I wish him dead... Yet I will emphatically not be caught up in the broader baying for blood and scalps... I fear for the thousands—possibly tens of thousands— of innocent victims in the coming months. At the same time, I cannot deny having such a heart that in any hunt— pities the hare...

Sunday, Sept. 30th



The photos of all 19 alleged hijackers have been released by the FBI. Most of their faces in the passport photos are not the least striking. They could belong to any young men passed on a street in Cairo, in a mall in Dubai or in any campus corridor in the west... Yet the photo of Mohammed Atta stood out. Even if the face were not ascribed to one of the most dastardly acts of mass murder in modern history, one would still be chilled by eyes of such strangeness...

Yet again I wonder how he and his 'team' could be so blinded by zealotry... It seems that were blinded to simple physics of cause/effect; action and probable reaction... Otherwise they might have spared a thought that what was likely to happen *after* their strike... They might have begun to doubt that Allah would grant martyrdom to those who would accept the infidel's calculus that one hundred Muslim scalps be taken for every one of their own lost...

It occurs that that Atta's team had more in common with the Heaven's Gate suicide cult than with a unit in a global octopus of terrorist cells at the ready...

Saturday, Oct. 20th

Awoken by the flutter of dark wings at 3:30 AM, I turned on the light. The ghostly echo from the dreamtime could have been from falling bombs... How many Afghan children are huddled in the dark, terrified by deafening roars and shaking earth?

There was that report yesterday, that cluster bombs are part of the arsenal of Operation Enduring Freedom... They are bombs specifically designed to kill or maim over a widespread area... Can the 'logic' behind the invention of a cluster bomb be any less insane than the logic of using a passenger jet as a guided missile?

I picked up the Heidegger dictionary from the night table and flipped to the pages where a bookmark was inserted in the page with the entry for '*technik*':

‘Technology is not primarily about a way of making or doing things but a way of revealing things that precede the making...’ When improperly understood, it: “...engulfs and diminishes the world thus threatening to turn man from a being in the world into a ‘mechanized animal’...”

Is the human who drops a cluster bomb on civilians any less a mechanized animal than the one who straps on a suicide vest? Ironical that both technologies, in their own insidious way, shield the perpetrator from the screams of its victims...



Tuesday, Oct 23rd

Just as feared in the days following the cataclysmic attack upon American home soil, the Bush administration is taking cynical advantage of the rare moment of international unity behind a military objective. Even before the NATO coalition has rooted Al Qaeda out of Afghanistan, the Americans seem to be already planning the next phase of their ‘war on terror.’

In right-wing media outlets, stories are percolating about a ‘link’ between Mohammed Atta and Iraqi intelligence... These rumours fly directly in the face of long-standing contrary evidence of mutual hostility between Saddam and Al Qaeda. For all its brutality, the secular regime in Iraq is itself threatened by proselytizing Islamic fundamentalist sects, whether of Shia or Sunni origins... Moreover, after his humiliation in the Gulf War a decade ago, Saddam is too shrewd to court annihilation by supporting a strike on the American homeland. Having gravely miscalculated once in the invasion of Kuwait—he is well aware that the leviathan awaits any excuse to strike a *coup de grace*...

Still, after Osama Bin Laden no longer serves as an anti-Christ, perhaps it will be convenient for the imperium to refocus fear on the face of Saddam Hussein... Perhaps some part of the ‘Enduring Freedom’ coalition might even hold together long enough for his take-down...

Whether Saddam, Gadhafi or Assad is in the bullseye after Osama—military objectives only dreamed about in the Pentagon before September 11th must now seem within reach... Every group regarded as hostile to American interests could be targeted—Hezbollah, Hamas—even the Mullahs in Iran. Plans for a sanitized Middle East are almost certainly being drawn up in consultation with the imperium’s #1 client state in the region... Clearly, the primary beneficiary of such a foundational shake-up would be Israel...

An Israel emboldened by the enfeeblement of its enemies could hardly resist the opportunity to push beyond its borders... More land could be captured, occupied and gradually settled like the West Bank after the 6 Day War... For the first time in a generation, the hard-core Likud could win *Lebenstraum* in fulfillment of the right wing *Eretz Yisrael* [Greater Israel] vision... Of course, the UN would vehemently oppose any expansion, but their howlings could be ignored so long as Israel enjoys the protection of the imperial veto... Meanwhile, American Israelophiles

could celebrate a biblically prophesized victory harkening back to King David's vanquishing of the Philistines...

As the nights grow darker and colder— such speculations abound...



2001, September- October

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